



# ETHICS IN ADVERTISING

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## ABSTRACT

Many studies have suggested that it is important for a company to indulge in ethical advertising of products and services. Globalization plays an important place in today's business environment, therefore it becomes necessary for companies to do ethical advertising of their products because ethical advertising basically looks after the interests of the society and also helps a company gain competitive advantage as competition has increased to a great level. The objective of the research is to study the various aspects of ethical advertising and their impact on the buying behaviour of Indian consumers. The study attempts to examine the degree and direction of relationship between the organisations which follow ethical means of reaching the customers through a mass media level of promotion i.e. advertising. Also, the study tends to recognise the contribution of various measures that are used by the sponsors of advertising on consumers' purchase intention.

## INTRODUCTION

Ethics or moral philosophy is basically a branch of philosophy which involves systematic, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. It basically answers the question about what is right or wrong. The term ethics derives from the Greek word "ethos" which means customs or habits. Ethics primarily investigates the questions like what is the best way for people to live? and what actions are right or wrong in a particular circumstances? The purpose of having ethics in a society is basically to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime.

Advertising is basically an audio or visual form of marketing communication that employs an openly sponsored, nonpersonal message to promote or sell a product, service or idea. Advertising is communicated through various mass media, including old media such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, outdoor advertising or direct mail; or new media such as search results, blogs, websites or text messages.

So basically, advertising supported by the ethics that prevail in a country, helps a company in attracting the consumers to buy their products or services or anything else, like idea or a message or a person or a place. The main purpose of doing advertising ethically is basically because of the norms and rules of society in which a company operates. For example, the television commercial advertisement of "Amul Macho" (2007), which introduced an actress, who washes a male underwear, with a tagline of 'ye toh bada toing hai' was found to be ethically wrong, so in turn the Advertising Standards Council of India cleared it for public viewing.

## ETHICS

According to Rushworth Kidder the various definitions of ethics have usually stated the phrases as "science of the ideal human character" or "science of moral duty". Larry Churchill said, "ethics understood as the capacity to think critically about moral values and direct or actions in terms of such values, is a generic human capacity". Ethics can be defined as one's own moral principles which may differ from person to person. Contradicting with the views of Rushworth Kidder, we cannot say that ethics have to have any scientific background as science is not variable. It basically follows rule of thumb whereas ethics change with perspectives of the people and they may not be same for everyone. What is right for one individual may not be the same for another. So, ethics can be called as right means to achieve the ends which may differ with the change in people's outlook.

## ADVERTISING

"Advertising is a form of nonpersonal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media" (Bovee, 1992).

Breaking up this definition, first of all it can be said that advertising is of non personal nature which means that there is no direct or physical contact between the marketer and the consumer. Second, it is a paid form of promotion which is charged as an expense against the profits of the company. Third, it is persuasive or influential in nature which either motivates the consumers to like or dislike the product or service offered. Fourth, it is done by the identified sponsors i.e. either the company itself or some agency can be hired by the company. Fifth, various media options are available to advertise a product like television, newspapers, radio channels etc.

"Comparison is the soul of advertisements. Problem emanates when the implied comparison becomes increasingly explicit." (Prof. Kavita Sharma, Advertising and Planning & Decision Making)

Advertising is the prime source of promotion for any company. Companies try to compete over the advertisements as it helps them in constructing their brand image which ultimately helps a company in gaining the loyalty of the consumers. But the comparison becomes competition for earning a larger market share when there is an uncensored comparison amongst various brands.

## ETHICAL ADVERTISING

"Advertising is about norms and values, aspirations and prejudices. It is about culture" says Anil Ambani.

Advertising is a concept that is very dynamic in nature and when we add the ethics in advertising, it becomes even more complex, as both of these have a variable character and are based on perspectives of the individuals or groups of individuals. The creativity in advertising is the essence which is nothing, but a human based characteristic and may vary from person to person. Also, ethics as said before may not be same for every individual. So when the principles of righteousness and morality are added to advertising, it takes a form of ethical advertising. Though, the meaning of ethics may be different for a consumer and a marketer, because there are different economic motives underlying. The marketer running a business will always try to maximize company's profits and the consumer will always try to maximize his/her level of satisfaction. When the company resides on the principles of customer satisfaction along with the motive of earning profits, it adopts an ethical way of gaining customer loyalty and building up a strong brand image and convinces the consumers to try and retain their product. Here, the ethical advertising comes into picture. The marketers following ethical advertising basically base their advertisements on the true characteristics of the product and do not mislead the consumers by exaggerating the claims and also do not take advantage of any fear of consumers (like low confidence due to obesity, dark complexion etc).

## ISSUES IN ETHICAL ADVERTISING

- **Advertising to children:** Marketers should not target the innocence of children and utilize it to their benefit as children do not have the ability to evaluate or judge the right and wrong for themselves. So, it is important for marketers to shift their focus from the children to other people in the society that can understand well and evaluate the effectiveness of their advertising. So, we can say that it is absolutely unethical to view children as their potential customers for products which may not favour them rather they should focus on the upper age segment.
- **Disputable products:** It is very important for consumers to identify and understand their needs and weaknesses. It is easy for the marketers to target the weaknesses like cigarettes, tobacco, gambling etc. which are not good for health, if consumed. Advertising of such products is banned in many countries including India.
- **Emotional advertising:** In a culture which encourages human behaviour and relationships, the majority of population in India is more sensitive towards emotional acts especially women. So it becomes easier for the marketers to base their advertisements on emotional values to direct a link between the consumer and the brand.

- **Materiality:** Advertisements which link success and materiality tends to mislead consumers and persuade them to buy the products which may not be affordable by them to enhance their lifestyle. This creates an image of happiness linked to material goods which is not tangent with our values.
- **Puffery:** Sometimes marketers tend to exaggerate about the products to manipulate consumer buying behavior. It is considered to be highly unethical as the product may not possess such qualities claimed by the seller. This is known as puffery.

### CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Consumer behaviour is basically the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy their needs and wants. It is also concerned with the social and economic impacts that purchasing and consumption behaviour has on both the individual consumer and on broader society. Also, consumer behaviour "refers to the buying behaviour of final consumers, both individuals and households, who buy goods and services from personal consumption" (Kumar, 2010).

Basically, the attitude or reaction of a consumer towards the marketing strategies of the sellers which induces them to accept or reject the product is known as buying behaviour of a consumer.

Factors affecting consumer buying behaviour:

- Cultural factors like family values, social class, cultural trends etc
- Social factors like reference groups, social roles and status etc
- Personal factors like purchasing power, lifestyle, demographic factors etc
- Psychological factors like motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes.
- Marketing techniques of sellers like personal selling, advertising etc

### ETHICAL ADVERTISING AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR

It is a matter of discussion whether the involvement of ethical issues in advertising affects the consumer buying behaviour or not. As there have been various scholars who have tried to establish a link between these two. But no consensus has been arrived at, as different studies have shown different results. If we look at the societal and cultural developments in the country it can be observed that consumers are much more aware and critical about the inside activities of the companies. More transparency in the companies' internal processes has been demanded by the consumers which clearly suggest that consumers not just want to know but they also judge the companies on the whether they follow ethical conduct.

Advertising is one such process which requires ethical conduct to attract the consumers. There has been a lot of research whether it actually enhances the public image of the company or not and also induces the consumers to buy more from the companies who follow ethical advertising or are they indifferent towards these practices.

### CONCERNS OF ETHICS IN ADVERTISING AFFECTING CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR

- **Content of the advertisement:** The whole structure including the message in the advertisement and also the storyline created for the presentation in case of television advertisements may affect the buying behaviour of the consumer as it is the first impression of the brand. An innovative and lively idea based advertisement is likely to retain in the minds as compared to the dull and boring advertisements. Ethical behaviour in this regard would be to not to exaggerate and mislead the consumers and show the true picture of the product.
- **Celebrity Endorsement:** Hiring a well established celebrity to market a product is the best possible way for marketers to acquire the interest of the consumers. This is because the brand name gets recognized with the name of the celebrity and it captures the market share equal to the fan following of such celebrity. Ethical behaviour in this regard would be to create a picture of the product in the minds of consumers and not the celebrity. Also, this is unfair to the small companies which are not able to afford such celebrity endorsements and are not able to capture the market even after having a useful product.
- **Sex Appeal:** Marketers these days tend to attract the youth by incorporating sex based appeals which instantly catches the attention of the target market. Like for example, women wearing lesser clothes or showing some intimacy between the actors may influence the sale of certain products which is highly unethical as such advertisements are not suitable for children.
- **Social Issues:** Incorporating social issues in advertisements is the latest trend in the Indian markets. Such ads portray an image of a responsible brand which along with marketing its product also gives a message to the society

which creates a positive brand image and hence the customer willingly adopts the brand. These are the kind of advertisers who voluntarily adopt the ethical norms of the society.

- **Laws And Regulations:** On one hand where advertisers tend to voluntarily adopt ethical behaviour, others are to be controlled by the government not to follow unethical behaviour. There are laws in the country which protects rights of the consumers and other related companies and shields them from the unethical conduct in advertising.
- **The Product Itself:** Sometimes the product itself is in a question of being unethical. So advertising of such products in itself is misleading. Products like alcohol, cigarettes, tobacco are highly unethical to be advertised. Advertising such products is banned in India and many other countries.

### CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

India is one such country which has a background of following CSR in every aspect of business. Also, there are laws and regulations which regulate the companies in adopting their responsibility towards the society. Ethics are the basis of corporate social responsibility. Companies following such practices have their brands recognised by the consumers which affect their buying behaviour.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Consumers buying behavior has always been given so much importance in the literature study of impact of advertising regarding its effectiveness (Ajzen, 2002). It was found that most of the time consumers buying behavior is influenced by liking or disliking of consumer towards the advertisement of the product, advertised (Smith et al., 2002). Likewise, Allen. Et al., (1992) argued that it is actually the emotional reaction which is developed after the advertising, for the product advertised, that influences the consumer buying behavior. In the words of Gorn (1982), the consumer behavior towards a product is totally dependant upon advertising, without any assessment of the quality of the product. Furthermore, Controversies over the impact of advertising on the consumer's buying trends and habits has always been present (George, 1989). It was also found that sometimes the advertisers over exaggerate the product's description and benefits in such a tactful manner that consumer gets psychologically under the pressure of advertising persuasiveness and intentionally decides to buy the advertised product (Smith et al., 2006). In the point of view of some people, it was found that now most of the consumers avoid the advertisement, because they consider the advertisement, just annoying and misleading.

Some consumers perceive the whole message when they see an advertisement, others experience emotions related to objective associations and memorize emotional elements of the advertisement, and still other focus their attention on the advertising execution. The studies prove that even brothers interpret the same message of an advertisement differently due to their different interests and life experience. It was found that the emotional component of advertising impact is determined through affective relations with an advertised object i.e. how an individual perceives the product: likes, dislikes, is repulsed by it, neutral towards it or resents it. Such reactions that cause emotional relation between individuals and advertisements, the object itself, finally boost purchase desire or reluctance. In order to achieve emotional effectiveness of advertisements, one should imagine the advertisement and decide how people with different characters will react to it, whether it will grab their interest. Research into consumers' emotional response to product, service, idea, or their advertisement constitutes the major part of advertising research.

Brunello (2010) focused on the relationship between ethics and advertising and basically brought forward the view points of various specialists and consumers regarding ethical advertising. His paper focused on three contradictory viewpoints, namely advocacy, accuracy and acquisitiveness. He also included the concepts of advertising regulations, which includes the norms and rules and most importantly ethics that advertising companies should look at the international level, European level and local level. Hemalat (2013) stressed on the responsibilities of the advertisers, that it is their responsibility to ethically place their advertisements about various products and services. She found that puffery, graduation, unethical or deceptive advertising, offensive or ads having bad ratings are some of the unethical practices. She also found that comparative advertising is another unethical practice of advertising besides fraudulent and deceptive advertising. Advertising is not unethical if it's done in the rights way. She emphasized that honesty, integrity and quality are the important features of ethical advertising. These features create value to all the stakeholders of the advertising media. Thus she concluded that strictly adhering to ethical values in advertisement will increase the market share for the advertised product which is need of the hour for the advertising media- the print and electronic.

### CONCLUSION

Just as the media of social communication themselves have enormous influence everywhere, so advertising, using media as its vehicle, is a pervasive, powerful force shaping attitudes and behaviour in today's world. People in advertising spend a lot of their time dealing with ethical choices, and those choices are almost never black and white. A lot of people question the ethics of selling consumers things they don't need - which presupposes that we shouldn't have the things we don't need but want anyway.

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